

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The following material provides an overview of the Edo period, which was marked by a rise in the merchant class, a decline in the prestige of the upper classes, and the growth of a vibrant urban culture in Edo. This provides a context in which Japanese woodblock prints became a popular art form for the common people and a new genre of landscape prints developed.

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Portions of the following text were taken from the “Hokusai and Hiroshige” exhibition catalog by Yoko Woodson, Reiko Mochinaga Brandon, and Julia White, as well as from the “Yokohama Prints” teacher workshop packet by Molly Schardt.

Introduction

From roughly 1470 to 1615, Japan was plagued by continuous civil war and internal strife as regional warlords fought for control of the country. This period of constant warring devastated the countryside and brought unprecedented pain and suffering. In 1615, Japan was forcibly unified by a powerful warlord and shrewd politician, Ieyasu Tokugawa. Ieyasu ruled with an iron hand, through a hierarchy of advisors and vassals, and the forced acquiescence of the emperor who lived in the old capital of Kyoto. Ieyasu established Edo (present-day Tokyo) as his new capital, transforming this previously sleepy, backwater town into the administrative center of Japan. It is from this city that the Edo period (1615-1868) derives its name. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Edo had a population of one million, making it the largest metropolis in the world. Edo was home to a literate population with the money, time, and desire for new art, entertainment, and literature.

Edo Politics and Society

After 150 years of civil war, the shogunate was determined to enforce and maintain a stable society and return the people to traditional values. Fearful of growing foreign influence and colonialism, the country was sealed off from the outside world in 1639, and remained so until 1853. Limited contact with Chinese and Dutch traders was permitted in the remote southern harbor of Nagasaki. All Japanese were forbidden to travel abroad; even those Japanese living outside the country at the time were cut off from contact.

The shogunate further extended its iron-fisted control of the people through a rigid class system with social and economic constraints. The highest class was composed of the samurai, followed by farmers, craftsmen, and at the lowest level, merchants. Nobility, Buddhist monks, Shinto priests, and social outcasts (beggars and prostitutes) were exempt from these classifications. This system reflected the social values placed on the different segments of society by the shogunate and was based on the Japanese interpretation of Chinese Confucianism. The structure was purely hereditary, and the rules of conduct, privileges, and duties of each class were strictly enforced.

Samurai

Japan was ruled by the *shogun* (supreme military dictator), while the emperor remained a figurehead leader in Kyoto. Sworn to obey the *shogun* were *daimyo* (feudal lords who were the highest-ranking samurai), who in turn were supported by samurai (retainers) of varying ranks.

To prevent the *daimyo* from becoming powerful enough to threaten civil war, Ieyasu enforced a system of alternate attendance (*sankin kotei*), which

required the feudal lords to maintain three extravagant residences in Edo, as well as similar homes in their fiefs. *Daimyo* had to alternate every year between their provincial residence and Edo homes. Wives and children, however, remained in Edo at all times, making them more or less hostages in the city if rebellion broke out. *Sankin kotei* ensured that the *daimyo* remained under close supervision by the shogunate, and that their resources were constantly drained, making the cost of rebellion and the danger to their families too great. Income from their land was the *daimyos'* only source of wealth (rice was the basis of the Japanese economy), which they squandered on lavish homes and elaborate processions to and from Edo. With such lavish living, the *daimyo* and samurai (who were dependent on the *daimyo* for their salaries) became increasingly poor. Many had to borrow money from merchants, who sometimes exceeded them in wealth during the Edo period.

Ironically, despite their poor financial state, the samurai remained the most privileged class as the landed aristocracy. During this period of peace, samurai found themselves without their duties of war. Many made the transition from military to civilian leadership by taking positions in the government bureaucracy. As was expected, they also regularly practiced artistic cultivation, such as the tea ceremony, ikebana (flower arrangement), calligraphy, and poetry. Others became scholars, artists, or musicians and were supported by their peers. However, less fortunate samurai, particularly those of a lower level, ended up without socially sanctioned employment. This was true of the masterless samurai who lost their patronage when their *daimyo* dropped from favor and had his estate confiscated.

Farmers

Farmers were next in social rank and produced the rice that was the samurai's source of wealth. They were the only citizens to pay taxes, which they paid for in rice. The samurai would raise taxes as much as they dared, achieving a kind of delicate balance, until some natural disaster led to famine, causing the farmers to riot. When conditions became unbearable, some of the peasants gave up their birthright as honorable farmers and joined the ranks of laborers, craftsmen, or merchants. Periodically, the shogunate would try to force them back onto the land, with mixed success.

Although their lives were hard, some enterprising farmers could purchase fields from their destitute neighbors. Some became quite rich, educated themselves and their children, and like wealthy merchants, at times commissioned art from well-known schools. The shogunate periodically issued edicts to control consumption among the farmers and other social classes, yet these attempts did not dissuade them from striving for a better life.

Craftsmen

Along with merchants, craftsmen maintained the economy of Edo and profited handsomely. Together, the craftsmen and merchants supplied a demand that the samurai had for luxurious goods of all kinds (silk, embroidery, porcelain, lacquer, painting, sculpture, prints, etc.), deemed necessities in the lifestyles and ceremonies of the upper classes. These two classes were referred to collectively as *chonin* (literally “residents of the block” or townspeople).

Merchants

Because they did not *produce* anything of value for society, merchants were at the bottom of the social ladder. They nevertheless accumulated great wealth that sometimes surpassed that of the samurai, and at times merchants acted as moneylenders to the upper classes. As Japan’s economy transformed from one based on agriculture to one of mercantilism, merchants gained the power and influence to become art patrons and cultural pacesetters (Swinton, 1995, p. 26). Some of the great family businesses in Japan today, such as Mitsui Corporation, were started in Edo.

Gradually, some merchants could afford luxuries and entertainment. Strict sumptuary laws, however, prevented them from open displays of wealth. At times, these repressive laws were contemptuously ignored. When it could not completely ban an activity, the shogunate sought to exercise control over it. This was how the Yoshiwara, the official and well-defined pleasure quarter in Edo, was created. With little freedom in how to spend their money, merchants splurged on entertainment, such as Kabuki theater, brothels, and wrestling tournaments.

Decline of the Shogunate

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the foundations of the shogunate were developing severe cracks. By the 1850s, there was widespread dissatisfaction at all levels of society. The overworked peasants, the impoverished samurai, the alienated and poor imperial family, and the repressed merchants all desired radical change. At the end of the Edo period, Japanese society struggled for an end to feudalism, which culminated in the revolution and restoration of the emperor in 1868.

Edo Culture and Lifestyle

Edo had a distinct consumer society born of the necessity to support the immense numbers of military living there. Although the *daimyos’* provinces supplied directly to them, they were nevertheless dependent on local goods and services. The professions required to build and sustain a new capital were traditionally held by men, such as artisans, merchants, construction workers, carpenters, tailors, surveyors, draftsmen, storekeepers, clerks, tatami makers, scholars, and legislators

(Matsunosuke, p. 37). As a result, the city's population was primarily male. Men outnumbered women two-to-one. The city's residential areas were segregated into areas for each of the four classes.

Lifestyles of the People

An urban culture developed that stressed an appreciation of nature and artistic cultivation. The banks of the Sumida River, with its great bridges, provided places for outdoor activities: daily strolls, spring cherry-blossom

viewing, relief from the summer heat, fireworks on summer nights, viewing the moon in autumn and viewing snow in winter.



Following the lead of Chinese culture, women and men of all classes engaged in the traditional arts of music, painting, calligraphy, and games of skill. With their accumulation of wealth, Edo townspeople also became patrons of art, creating a previously unprecedented "artistic pluralism" (Guth, p. 11). For the first time, the aristocracy no longer dictated artistic trends and production, despite attempts by the shogunate to curtail artistic consumption among its subjects. The artistic trends in Edo reflected a growth in popular culture and a demand for art with mass appeal.

Travel and Pilgrimage

The shogunate built an extensive network of waterways and highways that connected the three major cities of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka with smaller towns and ports. This facilitated increased travel among all classes. Besides business, pilgrimage was the most common reason for travel. Commoners made pilgrimages to sites of religious importance, such as famous Buddhist temples, ancient Shinto shrines, famous places such as Mount Fuji, etc. People often traveled under the pretense of religious pilgrimage, desiring to leave their routine life for awhile.

Publishers produced various types of guides and gazetteers that catered to the public's fascination with travel. Unlike earlier travel books, which were more like works of literature, Edo travel books were practical guides for the masses that included not only lodging information and advice on road conditions, but also historical tidbits about a place and its references in poetry. They were usually illustrated with black-and-white woodblock prints.

The Yoshiwara

The Yoshiwara, the licensed pleasure quarter of the city and center of social life, added to the vibrant culture of Edo. Although there were other pleasure quarters in every major city, such as Kyoto and Osaka, the Yoshiwara was most famous. Swinton (1995) likened the pleasure districts to fantasy theme parks of romance and adventure, rather than the crude modern-day concept of red-light districts. A self-contained community, the Yoshiwara was deliberately located away from the main section of Edo, in a conscious effort by the shogunate to prevent it from “polluting” the rest of the city. It housed approximately ten thousand people and was packed with brothels, Kabuki theaters, teahouses, restaurants, and bathhouses. People of all classes walked the streets, including samurai, street performers, beggars, gamblers, sumo wrestlers, courtesans, merchants, artisans, and travelers visiting this tourist destination. Whereas the rest of Edo was segregated among the classes, within the Yoshiwara, all Japanese could socialize more or less as equals.

The World of *Ukiyo-e*

Ukiyo-e (literally “pictures of the floating world”) is the name given to paintings and prints primarily depicting the transitory world of the Yoshiwara. It is a composite term of *uki* (floating), *yo* (world), and *e* (pictures). Originally, *ukiyo* was a Buddhist term to express the impermanence of human life. During the Edo period, however, *ukiyo* came to refer to the sensual and hedonistic pleasures of people, who embraced them all the more for their ever-changing nature. This concept was expressed in *Asai Ryoi*, “Tales of the Floating World” as quoted in Baker (p. 186):

“Living only for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, sun, the cherry blossoms and the maple leaves, singing songs, drinking wine, and diverting ourselves just in floating, floating, caring not a whit for the pauperism staring us in the face, refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current: this is what we call the floating world.”

Evolution of *Ukiyo-e* Painting and Woodblock Printing

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *ukiyo-e* began as hand-painted scrolls and screens of everyday life. Paintings often depicted popular recreations and entertainment, such as street dancing, cherry blossom viewing, and festivals, and beautiful women engaged in leisurely pursuits. Previously, most painters had been commissioned to do religious paintings, illustrations on courtly hand scrolls, or seasonal scenes. In contrast, this new *ukiyo-e* painting greatly appealed to the *chonin* of Edo. In order to meet the increasing demand, *ukiyo-e* began to be

mass-produced using carved wooden blocks at the end of the seventeenth century, due to its greater affordability.

Woodblock printing came to Japan during the eighth century and became the primary method of printing from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries. As in China, the technology was first used to duplicate Buddhist texts and then later, books of Chinese origin. It was not until the 1500s that books originally in Japanese began to be printed. Black and white illustrations were a part of these early texts, to which color was sometimes added by hand. As hand coloring was too time consuming to produce prints in enough quantities to satisfy the public's growing demand, techniques were developed to block print simple two- or three-color images. By 1765, artists like Harunobu were designing polychrome prints called *nishiki-e* or "brocade pictures." The addition of more colors resulted in prints that were more realistic and expressive.

The single-sheet prints were mass produced for consumption by the commoner and sold by street vendors and shopkeepers for pennies. As their lives became more comfortable, and they could afford to enjoy more activities, *ukiyo-e* became the most sought-after art form among the commoners. In attempts to control the conspicuous consumption of the merchant class, the government periodically issued edicts restricting the sizes, themes, and materials of *ukiyo-e*, and eventually censored the prints after 1799, to ensure subject matters were not immoral or politically subversive.

In this market-driven art form, styles often changed. Pigments for *ukiyo-e* prints were water based, vegetable dyes, which produced a soft and subtle range of colors. Artists and printers collaborated to produce ever more subtle effects such as the color nuances of a reflection in water and mirrors, or seeing objects through gauze textiles. A metallic powder called mica was sometimes added to colors to give a shimmering surface. By the time of Hokusai and Hiroshige, *ukiyo-e* prints were produced with up to twenty different colors, sometimes each requiring its own carved block. Artists were constantly trying to outdo one another in their prints, with beautiful colors and clever compositions.

Major Themes in *Ukiyo-e* Prints

Courtesans and Actors

Beautiful women of the Yoshiwara were among the original *ukiyo-e* subjects. These prints were the most popular and served as pin-ups, similar to posters of movie stars and celebrities today. Such overtly commercial products were considered cheap and vulgar by the nobility, although the cultured and beautiful courtesan represented the romanticized, feminine ideal among the commoners.

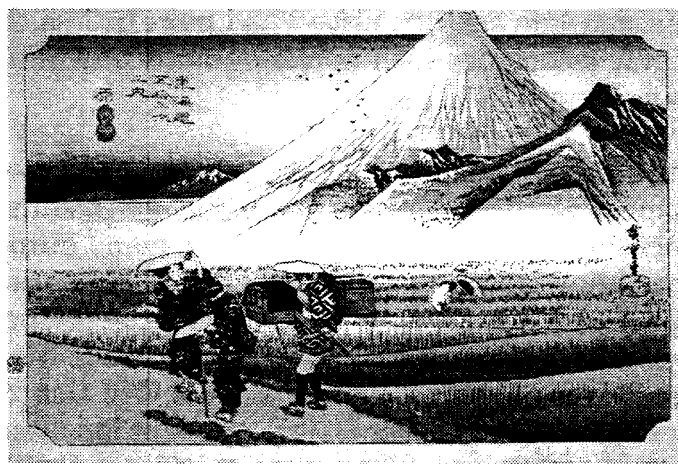
In addition to beautiful courtesans, popular Kabuki actors achieved immortality through *ukiyo-e* prints. Actors (like prostitutes) were excluded from the official social hierarchy. Nevertheless, they were treated as movie stars of the day, and were depicted in prints to announce an upcoming show or celebrate a certain performance. Such prints showed actors as the characters they portrayed, as well as in behind-the-scenes preparations for their plays.

Landscapes

Landscapes, a minor genre since the early period of *ukiyo-e*, began to appear as an independent subject in prints during the late 1820s for various reasons. In 1800, aiming at reducing the influence of the merchant class, the government issued measures to limit the production of Kabuki prints. They also restricted the use of colors in prints, and banned the use of expensive mica in portraits of courtesans and actors. These restrictions, coupled with improved printing techniques that allowed for superior gradations of color and subtle expressions in sky, light, water, and snow, resulted in the rise of landscape prints. Hokusai and Hiroshige are primarily known as landscape artists who brought this genre to its highpoint during the 1830s.

Travel

With a keen public interest in travel among all classes, publishers asked artists, most notably Hiroshige, to document the various highways. Hiroshige created prints that carefully documented the scenic beauty of the Tokaido Road, as well as the local culture and humor of stops along the way. *Ukiyo-e* artists frequently used travel books to help them in their designs of famous places, considering that they might not have visited the places themselves.



According to Swinton, Hiroshige made frequent use of gazetteers for his work, more so than any other print artist (1992, p. 64).

Meisho-e

Meisho (literally “place with a name”) referred to a place that had poetic, literary, spiritual, or historic connotations, especially those relating

to the seasons. In the concept of *meisho*, it was the romantic spirit or mood of a location, rather than the place itself that was most important in art. *Meisho-e* (“pictures of famous places”) included not only well-known landscapes, but also scenic city sights, bridges, rivers, waterfalls, Mount

Fuji, etc. These prints were purchased by travelers as souvenirs or to satisfy their curiosity of places not yet seen.

Western Influences on *Ukiyo-e*

Although Japan was cut off from the outside world, limited trade continued in the port of Nagasaki and after the lifting of the ban on foreign books in 1720, the study of Western learning increased. Through Dutch oil paintings and copperplate etchings, Japanese artists studied Western linear perspective. This technique utilized a single, fixed viewpoint, low horizon, systematic diminishing of size from foreground to background, chiaroscuro, and cast shadows that created visual distance and three dimensionality. Western-style perspective contrasted with the vertical painting format used in traditional Japanese art, that used a high horizon, bird's-eye view, and flatter picture plane. By the mid-eighteenth century, the first *ukiyo-e* prints using Western-style perspective appeared.

In addition, the introduction of a new blue pigment from Germany, called Prussian blue, provided Japanese artists with a lustrous dye that gave the illusion of depth and spaciousness in their landscapes. By combining Western and Japanese styles, *ukiyo-e* artists created a hybrid style that realistically portrayed landscape features.

Decline of *Ukiyo-e*

The technology and artistry of *ukiyo-e* peaked between 1750-1850. After this time, craftsmanship gradually declined from rising production costs. With decreasing market demand, publishers concentrated on print runs that could be produced as cheaply as possible for less discriminating buyers. Repetitious designs and the use of aniline dyes, instead of vegetable pigments, signaled the end of this art form. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, *ukiyo-e* had more or less ceased to exist, as other graphic techniques such as photography and lithography gained momentum.

While *ukiyo-e* declined in Japan, Western artists were “discovering” Japanese woodblock prints in the mid-nineteenth century and hailed them as artistic masterpieces. By the 1870s, many European scholars and artists were seriously studying Japanese art. *Ukiyo-e* prints had a particular impact on the works of progressive painters (especially the Impressionists), such as Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Edouard Manet, Vincent van Gogh, and James McNeill Whistler. Western painters were impressed by the brilliant, solid colors of Japanese prints, their simplified contour outlines, and flat asymmetrical compositions with little illusionary space. Artists experimented with flattening planes in their compositions and brightening their palettes, which eventually helped develop a modern abstract style.

The Art of Printing

In order that *ukiyo-e* prints feature the latest favorites of a discerning public, prints had to be published very quickly. Publication was a complex process involving the collaboration of several people: publisher, artist, carver, and printer. Publishers were the key figures in the printing process from start to finish: assessing the market, hiring the designer, supervising production, and arranging for distribution. It was the publisher's seal that appeared on each print, with the artist's signature. The only other person who had a say in production was the government censor, who checked all designs to make sure they were neither immoral nor politically subversive.

After a publisher had decided upon the subject matter for a print or series of prints, he commissioned an artist to create the design. The artist would draw his composition in black ink on a thin sheet of paper. Although the artist might include notes and directions on his drawing, he was not involved in the printing process. This could sometimes lead to the artist's dissatisfaction with the finished product, due to unexpected changes made by the engraver or printer. Hokusai apparently complained during the production of his volume of sketches (*Hokusai Manga*) that the engraver had added facial details too much like those found in the prints of his contemporary, Utagawa Toyokuni (Williams, p. 3).

The artist's drawing was then sent to the printer's workshop, where it was pasted face down on a block of smooth cherrywood. Oil was sometimes applied to the paper to make the outlines more visible. The paper was then pulled away (Japanese paper was very strong and fibrous) to leave a thin layer behind with the design outlines showing through.

The carver then cut away the wood around the lines, a crucial task requiring great skill. The beauty and refinement of Japanese woodblock prints was dependent on his fine touch. After the block face had been carved, printers removed the residue of paper and carefully brushed black *sumi* ink onto the raised lines of the block. They placed the damp paper to be printed on the block, and rubbed it rigorously with a *baren*, a tool made of twisted cord covered with a bamboo sheath. This rubbing motion forced the paper into hard contact with the inked lines of the woodblock. These line proofs were then given to the government censor for approval and to the artist for coloring. Using the artist's hand-colored proof, the carver would cut more blocks, sometimes one for each color. Each block would have registration marks (*kento*) to assure that the lines and colors would be in proper alignment on each pass. Because cherrywood was very expensive, carvers would often use both sides of the block to conserve wood.

Now everything was ready for the final printing and distribution. Several printers would ink and press the paper onto each of the blocks. Colors

were printed one at a time; a minimum of about ten impressions were necessary to print an average *nishiki-e* (Kanada, p. 46). With each impression, printers had to align the paper into the block's registration marks, so that colors with each successive pass would fall in the proper location. Paper came in three typical sizes: *chuban* (literally "medium block" measuring about 10 x 7 inches), *aiban* ("medium-large block" measuring about 13 x 9 inches), and *oban* ("large block" measuring approximately 10 x 15 inches). *Oban* was the standard size used for *ukiyo-e* prints.

About 200 prints (the usual edition of any particular design) could be made in one day. Sometimes, blocks kept in storage would be reprinted, but as the wood wore down, the line quality gradually deteriorated. However, as many as 8,000 prints could be made from a block before cutting a new one.

A Look at the Artists

Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige, with thirty-seven years between them in age, were equally well rounded artists. They excelled in traditional painting, woodblock-prints for books, and single-sheet prints of courtesans or actors. However, both are best remembered for their landscape designs. Hokusai's work could be wild in presentation, experimental, and bold. In contrast, Hiroshige depicted nature in a realistic, delicate and elegant manner, displaying a gentle humor and sympathy for the common people. Yet, despite their differences in temperaments and styles, both artists raised the artistry of this previously minor genre to new heights.



Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Hokusai was born on October 31, 1760, in Honjo, Edo, of unknown parentage. While Hokusai moved at least ninety times throughout his life, he never left this region. He was adopted as a child by the prestigious artisan-family Nakajima Ise, who made mirrors for the *shogun*. He possibly might have been a son of Ise by his mistress.

As a teenager, Hokusai was a delivery boy for a booklending shop and also apprenticed to a woodblock carver. At the age of eighteen, Hokusai began serious training in print design under Katsukawa Shunsho (1726-1792), an eminent designer in Kabuki actor and theater prints. Under the name Shunsho, Hokusai illustrated storybooks and created prints

depicting beautiful women. After his teacher's death in 1793, Hokusai entered a period of wandering, searching restlessly for different styles and themes in association with artists outside the Katsukawa School.

An eccentric artist, Hokusai changed his artistic name at least twenty times. In 1797, he began using the name Hokusai, the best known to us. Frequently, he combined it with others, creating a variety of names, such as Sori arateme Hokusai ("Hokusai changed from Sori"), Hokusai Sori, or Gakyojin Hokusai ("A Man Mad about Art, Hokusai").

Around 1804, Hokusai studied Western styles based on Dutch copperplate prints. In his new work influenced by the Dutch prints, Hokusai gave an illusion of space and landscape elements using light and dark shadows and signed his name horizontally in imitation of Western artists.

Between 1811-1830, Hokusai published an enormous number of illustrated books. The most important was *Hokusai Manga* ("Hokusai's Random Sketches"), which took thirty-eight years to complete. Only two volumes were published at this time.

The year 1831 marked the beginning of Hokusai's most productive period, while he was in his seventies. He published his monumental landscape series, *Thirty-six View of Mount Fuji*. Although the title indicates thirty-six, forty-six prints were made. Because of their popularity, the publisher added ten prints to the series. The series probably took a few years to complete.

Between 1833-34, three other major series were published: *A Tour of Japanese Waterfalls*, *Imagery of the Poets*, and *Rare Views of Famous Bridges in All Provinces*. Another important publication was *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*. From 1836 to 1845, Hokusai diligently worked on book illustrations and various commissioned works.

Despite his prolific work and relative fame, Hokusai constantly battled poverty. Unlike masters of the prestigious painting schools, *ukiyo-e* artists were poorly paid. Hokusai's frequent name changes may have resulted from the need to sell his old names to students, a common practice among artists. His multiple changes in residence could also have been due to poverty. Hokusai died on May 10, 1849 at age ninety at his house in Asakusa. His funeral took place the next day, paid for by pupils and friends.

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Hiroshige was born in 1797 in Edo. His father was the warden of the Edo fire brigade that serviced the *shogun*. Although his father was a low-ranking samurai, he must have raised his son with the samurai code of ethics and in a dignified atmosphere.



Hiroshige's death portrait, created by his friend Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1864) shows the artist at age sixty-eight, dressed in formal clothes and seated in a dignified manner. Such an upbringing helped develop the elegant, gentle style of his art.

At the age of thirteen, Hiroshige lost both parents and inherited his father's position. In 1810 or 1811, he sought in vain to learn *ukiyo-e* under the most powerful master of Kabuki actor portraits, Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825). Toyokuni, having more students than he could handle, turned Hiroshige over to his friend Utagawa Toyohiro (1773-1829).

Toyohiro's interest in landscape prints, a minor genre at the time, influenced his young apprentice. For some years, Hiroshige worked on book illustrations, designs of beauties, and inexpensive types of beauty prints. In 1822, at age twenty-seven, Hiroshige retired from his position as a fire warden and became a full-time artist. It is difficult to explain why Hiroshige, with his samurai status (albeit one of low rank), wanted to become an *ukiyo-e* artist. The financial state of the lower-ranking samurai had become increasingly difficult, and when young Hiroshige started training with Toyohiro, he might have wished to earn extra income.

Hiroshige's first landscapes were ten prints of *Famous Places in the Eastern Capital*, published in 1825. Here, he adopted Western conventions to create a new hybrid style. His work at this time already revealed his particular interest in changes in nature due to weather, time, and seasons.

In 1832, Hiroshige reportedly traveled the Tokaido Road to Kyoto on official business; he was accompanying an entourage of the *shogun's* officials with their annual gift of horses to the emperor in Kyoto. The trip must have been an eye-opening experience for Hiroshige. Returning to Edo, he immediately launched on his monumental project of publishing the *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road*. It was scarcely a year since Hokusai had published his famous *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, of which Hiroshige was undoubtedly aware.

In 1835, Hiroshige was involved in publishing the *Sixty-nine Stations of the Kiso Road*, comprising seventy prints. The project began as a collaboration with another artist Eisai Eisen (1791-1848), but for some reason, Hiroshige took over the project, designing forty-six prints in all. It could have been that Eisen's designs were not selling well and the publisher decided to change artists. The Kiso Road was an alternative highway connecting Edo to Kyoto through mountainous regions and was thus difficult to travel. Hiroshige's evocative style portrayed a true sense of nature and the people living in perfect harmony.

In 1856, Hiroshige began his largest series, *One Hundred Views of Edo*. For a native resident, the theme of Edo was always in Hiroshige's mind. In the vertical format of the standard *oban* size, Hiroshige revealed his mature style in depictions of the metropolis that fascinated all people.

In 1858, Hiroshige died suddenly at the age of sixty-two, a victim of the cholera epidemic that plagued Edo and claimed 28,000 lives.